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Tasmanians

"After describing their manner of cooking and eating a meal, he [KS: Dr. Ross] continues: 'Their natural politeness was constantly urging me to partake with them, and, not to disoblige them, both I and my child each took a leg of nicely cooked kangaroo-rat in our hands."

"No very striking or remarkable customs appear to have prevailed among the Tasmanians. We are told by Péron (p. 221), that kissing and embracing were seemingly unknown to them as salutations, for having thus saluted one of the natives, Péron adds: 'From the air of indifference with which he received this proof of our interest, it was easy to judge it had no meaning for him;' while in another place (p. 282) he says: 'I must not omit to mention an interesting discovery I then made [in an interview with fourteen aborigines]; it was, that they had no idea of the action of embracing.' He then proceeds to describe how he endeavoured to make them understand by practical demonstrations, but that their only response was Nidego (I do not know), leading him to believe that the custom of embracing was unknown to these people. He adds: 'I must, however, guard myself from stating this to be a positive fact, only adding here that I have never seen a savage, either in Van Diemen's Land or New Holland, embrace one of their own, or one of the opposite sex.' According to La Billardière (II. p. 33), the action of hand-shaking was not unfamiliar to them, judging from the following incident which he has recorded. A party of natives having been met with, 'I hesitated not,' he says, 'to go up to the oldest, who accepted.., a piece of biscuit.... I then held out my hand to him as a sign [73] of friendship, and had the pleasure to perceive, that he comprehended my meaning very well: he gave me his, inclining himself a little, and raising at the same time his left foot, which he carried backward in proportion as he bent his body forward.' The

indifference, and possibly dislike, of the Tasmanians, to kissing, is amusingly illustrated in the following anecdote narrated by West (p. 89): 'A little boy, captured by a surveyor in 1828, ... on entering a room where a young lady was seated, was told to kiss her; after long hesitation, he went up to her, laid his fingers gently on her cheek, then kissed them, and ran out!' While they appear to have been demonstrative in their reception of friends, strangers were treated with indifference."

"Backhouse (p. 81) says: 'A considerable number of the aborigines were upon the beach when we landed. . . but they took no notice of us until requested to do so by W. J. Darling; they then shook hands with us very affably. It does not accord with their ideas of proper manners to appear to notice strangers, or be surprised at any novelty.' On a subsequent occasion, however, Backhouse (p. 180) tells us, that 'On approaching this place, we were discovered by some women. . . they now recognized us as old acquaintances, and gave us a clamorous greeting. . . with such a noise as, had we not known that it was the expression of friendship on the part of the people, would have been truly appalling.' Péron also describes a friendly greeting on the part of some aborigines whom he had previously met. He states (pp. 225-226) that: 'As soon as they saw us they raised great shouts of joy, and doubled their pace in order to rejoin us. . . The old man taking M. Freycinet, made the sign for us to follow, and conducted us to the miserable cabin we had just left. The fire was lighted in an instant; and after having repeated several times médi, médi (sit down), which we did, the savages squatted on their heels,' etc., etc."